

FIRST READING: Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23

A reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes:

Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth, vanity of vanities! All things are vanity! Here is one who has labored with wisdom and knowledge and skill, and yet to another who has not labored over it, he must leave property. This also is vanity and a great misfortune. For what profit comes to man from all the toil and anxiety of heart with which he has labored under the sun? All his days sorrow and grief are their occupation; even at night his mind is not at rest. This also is vanity.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 89:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14, 17.

If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

You turn man back to dust, saying, "Return, O children of men." For a thousand years in your sight are as yesterday, now that it is past, or as a watch of the night.

If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

You make an end of them in their sleep; the next morning they are like the changing grass, Which at dawn springs up anew, but by evening wilts and fades.

If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart. Return, O Lord! How long? Have pity on your servants!

If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Fill us at daybreak with your kindness, that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days. And may the gracious care of the Lord our God be ours; prosper the work of our hands for us! Prosper the work of our hands!

If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

SECOND READING: Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians:

Brothers and sisters: If you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory. Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry. Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: Luke 12:13-21

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me." He replied to him, "Friend, who appointed me as your judge and arbitrator?" Then he said to the crowd, "Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions." Then he told them a parable. "There was a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest. He asked himself, 'What shall I do, for I do not have space to store my harvest?' And he said, 'This is what I shall do: I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones. There I shall store all my grain and other goods and I shall say to myself, "Now as for you, you have so many good things stored up for many years, rest, eat, drink, be merry!"' But God said to him, 'You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they

belong?' Thus will it be for all who store up treasure for themselves but are not rich in what matters to God."

The Gospel of the Lord

Reflection for the 18th Sunday of the Year C

It sure sounds like this guy Qoheleth is really depressed; almost as if he's lived through two and a half years of COVID pandemic, the closing of our three local parishes and merging them into one! Exactly what is he saying here? Are God's creation, you and I vanity too? Aren't we, all of humanity, created in God's image and likeness? What of God's gifts to us; are they but vanity as well? I hope that the message of today's first reading is more hopeful than that. As a fellow traveler through this life, Qoheleth has faced all the slings and arrows that we do now. Can we find meaning in life's unfairness? Can we make a difference in other people's lives? How do we cope with what life brings us. We live, as people with other people. With them we share our stories and through them we find compassion and support. We, like Qoheleth, are also believers in God. We seek God's active presence in our lives. In God's presence we find the grace to thrive in this life and hope for the next.

Personally, I think that the man is griping to God. Some of us are afraid to do that because we mistake God to be vengeful and forget that God is always love; infinite, eternal and unconditional. This passage is Qoheleth praying to God in what's called a lament. He was not afraid to offer his pain and cynicism to God. We offer ourselves to God as we are, flawed, hurting and weak. God accepts us even when we sin! God didn't turn this man away. As a matter of fact, and proven by today's first reading, Qoheleth made it into the bible. God will never turn us away either.

Paul's letter, today, has an historical context. The Church, in Paul's day, expected the return of Jesus and the coming of God's kingdom to be immanent; like yesterday. They felt that they had no use for life in this world to be of any value. It would be passing away very soon. They sought to detach themselves from the worldly life and attach themselves completely to Christ and life in the Kingdom of God. This would change as the coming of Christ didn't happen. We, today, still await it and we do not expect it to be soon. The hidden aspect of Christian life is in the Kingdom yet to come.

When Paul points out the path of life to take, it is always in the context of the indwelling life of the Spirit through, with and in the Church as the People of God. Witness to Jesus is still through our thoughts, attitudes and actions toward others. Paul's admonition to live our faith is what will bring Jesus into the world. This is the way that Paul's faith and the life of the Church of Jesus have lasted to this day. We have also received his letter to the Colossians and read it today. How well do we live our faith?

Paul also mentioned the diversity of the Church at Colossae. The city of Colossae was located in, what is today, central Turkey; then part of the Roman Empire. It was a hub of commerce and trade in the ancient world, not unlike Chicago. People from all parts of the Empire either visited or lived there. Koine Greek was the Lingua Franca of its day, the city's common language. English is ours. There were many migrants in ancient Colossae as there are in Chicago today. Most of us don't have far, in our ancestral lineage, to find our foreign roots. The Church in

Colossae faced some of the linguistic and cultural challenges that we do. Not all people share a common heritage. But we all share our common life and faith in Christ Jesus. It is his presence that makes us, in our diversity, one Church. This is a good lesson as we merge to form our new parish Church.

Today's gospel began with a family dispute and squabble into which Jesus did not want to be entrapped. He said he wasn't an arbitrator between parties. Jesus is a mediator between God and us. Jesus two natures, fully divine and fully human achieve that end. Jesus will also return to judge us when he returns at the end of this age. So, does Jesus actually have some sort of legal role? Our legal system is punitive; the guilty get punished and those liable must pay. That's not Jesus' role either. For us in our legal system, justice is blind. God is love and God's justice is always forgiveness. Love is the heart of God's justice for sinners, of whom I am foremost. Thank God for this good news.

Jesus' parable is not about forsaking bank accounts, investments or pension funds. It's about knowing from where our giftedness truly comes; from the grace of God. There is nothing wrong with merriment either. Jesus, in the gospels, is always out to dinners, banquets and festivals. The last supper was the Jewish Seder Meal at Passover. I've been to some. They are big meals with several glasses of wine. Ritual meals, for sure, but also a lot of fun. As believers we can enjoy, as fully as is possible, the gifts God gives us. Life is for living! Life is God's gift!

Sometimes, our secular values can influence what Jesus tells us of eternal life and the Kingdom of God. Our good deeds are not like extra credit like in grammar school. God does not give brownie points. Part of the treasure we store in Christ is our love for others. Its source is the love of Jesus. This is sort of a circular thing like what goes around comes around. God first loved us enough to send Jesus to die in our place for our sins. Jesus loved us in turn and died on the cross to save us. Jesus told us to love one another as he first loved us. When we do this, Jesus shares his love as we love. This is the treasure we share with Jesus and one another that shows we share eternal life. Eternal life with God can get no better than God's infinite, eternal and unconditional love. God's richness is us is reflected through us as we love others.

From whom does all life come? It comes from God. All creation bears God's imprint. Each and every member of the human race, of which there is only one, is created in God's image and likeness. God's presence lives in each of us. God is a mere thought away, never to leave. In all we do and say, as people of faith, we give witness to our new life in Christ. Qoheleth may have had a bad day. But even on our worst day, we can witness to the goodness of God who has seen us through it to this day. We can witness God's presence in all creation and each other as we give witness to the new life that is now ours.

May we know the bounty of God in all creation.

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